

ATOMIC SELF-HEALING ARCHITECTURE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/396,369, filed on July 16, 2002. The disclosure of the above application is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to architectures for advanced communications within electric power networks at all levels from generation sites to final power consumption end-points. The purpose of the communications is to create a power delivery system capable of furnishing utilities and customers with advanced features including the ability of the delivery network to self-heal.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] There is considerable interest today in an advanced power delivery system that would embed sophisticated networking and information communicating and processing components within the power distribution grid. With such a system, it would be possible to control power usage in heretofore unrealized ways, to implement a power distribution network that:

- Is self-healing,
- Is secure,
- Provides for market based pricing features,
- Supports a wide variety of different local and remote power generation systems,
- Has advanced data communications features for end customers,

- Interacts with consumer power-consumption devices, and
- Facilitate real time and other interactions between any elements.

[0004] While the uses of such an advanced power delivery system are many, such an advanced power delivery system would create a highly advantageous environment in which to deploy smart appliances that:

- Can communicate with one another peer-to-peer,
- Can form part of a distributed computing infrastructure,
- Can propagate their control interface to another entity, allowing heretofore unrealized remote control and system integration via proxy,
- Can communicate over the internet, and
- Participate in sophisticated, real-time control schemes.

[0005] Until now, however, such advanced power delivery systems have not been practical due to the lack of sophisticated architecture that would support the above capabilities and features. The present invention provides such an architecture through the use of a highly flexible Node Element that may be configured to meet the needs of each specific application, spanning the power generation point to the final consumption points.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] In accordance with one aspect, the invention provides an advanced communications system for an electric power network. More specifically, the advanced communications system implements an architecture that utilizes a Node Element, deployable on the electric power network, that has a global port and an inward port. The Node Element further has a global data store that is populated with information supplied via the global port and which is accessible via the local port. The Node Element also has a local data store that is populated with information supplied via the local

port and is accessible via the global port. The Node Element is configured to selectably support at least one of three planes of interaction, using information maintained within the global and local data stores. The three planes of interaction include a power analysis plane of interaction, a data plane of interaction, and a control plane of interaction.

[0007] In accordance with another aspect, the invention provides a method for facilitating interactions among a plurality of devices coupled to one another over a utility power network. The devices may have power and analysis monitoring capability, control and communication capability, and combinations thereof. The method entails providing each of the devices with an inward port, for establishing at least one of a power and analysis monitoring, control and communications link with at least one second device of the plurality of devices which is located downstream in the network;

[0008] The method further entails providing each of the devices with a global port for establishing at least one of a power and analysis monitoring, control and communications link with at least one third device of the plurality of devices which is located upstream in or at a same network layer portion of the network; and

[0009] Additionally, the method entails providing each of the devices with at least one globally available local interface, wherein the globally available local interface extracts interaction data from the links established at the global port or the inward port and processes the interaction data to identify source and destination devices corresponding to the established links and to identify at least one of distributed computing instructions, data aggregation instructions, device control instructions and

aggregated data clusters, wherein the globally available local interface universally formats at least a portion of the interaction data associated with the link established at the inward port for transmission to at least one of the second device and the third device.

[0010] In yet another aspect, the invention provides an appliance for coupling to an electric power network. The appliance includes an appliance processor that supports an appliance control interface having an associated data store of appliance control data. The appliance is provided with a Node Element having a global port coupled to the electric power network and an inward port configured to access the data store of appliance control data. The node element is configured to propagate the appliance control interface through the global port, thereby allowing access to the data store of appliance control data from the electric power network.

[0011] For a more complete understanding of the invention, as well as its many objects and advantages, refer to the remaining specification and to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] The present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description and the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0013] Figure 1 provides a conceptual view of the overall electric power distribution network from generation sites all the way to final consumption points.

[0014] Figure 2 shows the layers in the overall power delivery network and the notion that a node element common to all nodes can be used as the central ingredient of an advanced power delivery network.

[0015] Figure 3 shows the key parts of the Node Element.

[0016] Figure 4 depicts three types of interactions supported by the Node Element.

[0017] Figure 5 is an example, for the sake of discussion, of a possible residential deployment.

[0018] Figure 6 is an example with four different logical interactions shown.

[0019] Figure 7 is an exemplary appliance utilizing the node element and communication system of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0020] The following description of the preferred embodiment(s) is merely exemplary in nature and is in no way intended to limit the invention, its application, or uses.

[0021] The general concept of power delivery from generation points to consumption points is shown in Figure 1. The operational support system (OSS) component 10 at the top depicts the pervasive nature of OSS (operational support system) and that it participates in the process at all levels.

[0022] One goal of this invention is to provide architectures and architectural elements for interactions between network elements to facilitate an advanced power delivery system that can, among other things:

- Be self-healing
- Be secure
- Provide for market based pricing features
- Support a wide variety of different local and remote power generation systems
- Have advanced data communications features for end customers

- Interact with consumer power-consumption devices
- Facilitate real time and other interactions between any elements

There are three important portions, which are (see Figure 1):

- Power hierarchy
 - Multiple generation points feed into the transmission grid (High Voltage or HV). In Figure 1, see transmission network 12.
 - Points on the transmission grid feed into distribution grids (Medium Voltage or MV). In Figure 1, see distribution network 14.
 - Points on the distribution grid feed into LV (Low Voltage) networks and then to individual consumption points (e.g., industrial locations, commercial establishments, individual homes, street lights and so on). In Figure 1, see low voltage distribution network 16.
 - Inside the home, there are many power consumption points (e.g., Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning or HVAC, domestic hot water heaters or DHW, etc.). In Figure 1, see the exemplary in-home LAN 18.
- Interworking hierarchy
 - Transmission grid interworking network would be based on high speed fiber
 - Distribution grid interworking could be based on various different forms (e.g., Power Line Communications or PLC, Local Multipoint Distribution System or LMDS, Multi-channel Multipoint Distribution Service or MMDS, etc.)
 - Communications at power consumption points inside the home could use various forms as well (e.g., PLC, Home Phone Line Alliance or HPNA, wireless such as 802.11a, IEEE1394, Ethernet, etc.)
 - OSS oversees the entire network in a distributed fashion
- Node Elements
 - Supports many physical and logical interfaces
 - Facilitates interactions between dissimilar devices
 - Permits efficient distributed processing among nodes
 - Allows peer-to-peer style interactions among nodes
 - Generates structured aggregates (e.g., data, services, etc.) on all devices on the inward port
 - Maintains global structured aggregates on all global port devices (e.g., data, services, etc.)
 - Makes selected local interfaces available to elements at any level in the hierarchy

[0023] This architecture advocates using one basic structure, namely the Node Element described later, and applying it throughout the

advanced power network. The Node Element has optional features and different performance levels to meet a wide range of needs. Each Node Element instantiation has a specific set of features and performance levels that are tailored to that location.

[0024] A common structure can be used, as proposed above, at each node at every layer throughout the network, as diagrammed in Figure 2, because a shared set of capabilities including peer-to-peer interactions, distributed computing, interface propagation and data aggregation fulfills the requirements for all applications. In Figure 2, Node Elements are shown as black dots. As will be more fully described herein, these Node Elements make it possible to propagate interfaces, such as interface 20 across the network, to essentially any network layer, as needed.

[0025] A peer-to-peer capability makes interactions potentially more efficient and more reliable. Distributed computing permits using more powerful computational methods and allows for autonomous operation. Data aggregation supplies a nodes distributed computations with the data needed to carry out their tasks. Propagating interfaces provides effective and direct remote, real-time control of devices between any two locations in the network.

[0026] This architectural theme relates to a single highly flexible Node Element, configured to meet the needs of each specific application, to build an advanced power network from generation points to final consumption points.

[0027] The proxy concept allows vastly different devices (e.g., PC's, HVAC units, etc.) connected with vastly different communications networks (e.g., wireless, HPNA, PLC, etc.) to interact with each other to exchange

information and control commands. Moreover, the concept allows elements deep in the global network to have precise and real-time control over devices by assessing their interfaces directly through the proxy.

[0028] Self-healing is made possible because of the continuously updated Global Structured Aggregate information available at each node and the small autonomous subnets formed with peer-to-peer interactions. Given these features, it is possible to build a network that can anticipate or have knowledge of network faults and reconfigure to compensate.

[0029] Where there is a choice of communications within the power network, different choices in different parts of the network will be selected to meet the demands of the installation, to meet financial objections or to meet other goals. Therefore, the network will consist of many different forms. Furthermore, devices within the network that need to interact with other devices may use different protocols, have different capabilities and so forth. The concept of proxy interfaces provides an interface between dissimilar technologies and allows them to interact.

[0030] This interaction is further enhanced with several other features. The first is the ability of the node elements to make local interfaces, from devices in their sub-networks, available to devices at various locations within the global network. The next is to promote efficient distributed processing among node elements. Finally, peer-to-peer style communications is made available to all node elements.

[0031] Node Element. The concept of a node element is shown in Figure 3. The node element 22 has two external ports; one for interactions

with the global network (Global Port 24 or GLP) and the other interacts with a subset network (Inward Port 26 or INP).

[0032] The GLP (Global Port) gives access to the inward networks structured aggregate (Local Structured Aggregate or LSA) as well as certain local interfaces. Additionally, the GLP maintains the global structured aggregates (GSA) for use by the proxy and the inward network devices. The inward port maintains the inward networks local device data, services and so on.

[0033] Efficient peer-to-peer communications among node elements is part of the design of the GLP/INP. Global availability of local device interfaces along with peer-to-peer communications make real-time control possible. What's more, with less entities directly involved in the interactions, there is a higher level of reliability.

[0034] Distributed computing among node elements gives the network more autonomy and is a built-in feature of each node element. Global aggregates are used in distributed computing for a portion of the data used in computations.

[0035] Built-in features of every communications link will include security and quality of service (QOS) capabilities. If an existing communications technology is being considered, it must meet the requirements or else be capable of being supplemented to meet the requirements else it will be rejected for the intended application.

[0036] Planes of Interaction. There are three planes of interactions at each node; namely, Power Analysis and Monitor (PA/M), Data Plane (DP) and Control Plane (CP) and this concept is presented in Figure 4.

[0037] The PA/M (Power Analysis and Monitor) plane of interaction can be used for implementing, for example, Power Quality of Service (pQoS). The DP (Data Plane) of interaction is for data communications such as connections to the Internet. The CP (Control Plane) is used to make real time adjustments, as an example, to power consumption devices such as HVAC units to meet local and/or global objectives.

[0038] Node Elements. Identical node elements are employed throughout the power network. Node elements are modular blocks with a set of optional features that can be included or excluded based on the needs of the specific application. Optional features include:

- Real-Time Interface Propagation (i.e., interface details)
- Aggregate Method (i.e., which variables, which services, etc.)
- Support for PA/M, DP and/or CP

[0039] The node elements have options, again the choice depends on the application, and they include:

- Communications security options (e.g., DES, ₃DES, etc.)
- Communications QoS options (e.g., best effort, committed information rate, etc.)
- Performance options (e.g., hard real-time, real-time, on-line, etc.)
- Computational options (e.g., signal processing, data processing, etc.)

[0040] The choice of options and features would be determined for a specific application by examining the application and extracting requirements. These application requirements would then be transformed into parameters used to choose features and options.

[0041] Application Examples. As a way to clarify the concepts, the following paragraphs use examples to illustrate how the concepts can be used.

[0042] One of many possible arrangements for residential installations is shown in Figure 5. This configuration represents a realistic subset of devices in a home and the configuration will be used to explain the overall concept. It is important to note that this example is but one of many and in no way restricts the generality of the invention.

[0043] In this particular example, the communications form for power consumption devices in each house is in-home PLC (e.g., Home Plug Alliance or HPA). Data communications between the gateway and a PC (e.g., Internet access) in one case is with wireless (802.11a) and the other is HPNA. Even supposing all the devices in the home use the same PLC technology, make note that they may be built by different manufacturers, each home may have different product models, their logical interfaces may be different, and each has different capabilities. Access PLC is used, for this particular example, at the LV and MV distribution, although the concept is general and any form would work.

[0044] Each device has its own capabilities and may have a unique command interface. For example, the HVAC system would have controls for activating the ventilation fans (e.g., controlled to maintain air freshness), the heating element (e.g., controlled to keep the home warm in the cold weather) and the air conditioning pump (e.g., controlled to keep the home cool in the summer). It would also use, among other possible inputs, environmental conditions from indoor and outdoor sensors such as temperature and humidity

to operate. The water heater has only one control function; namely to maintain a constant water temperature, although it could use some of the same inputs as the HVAC system. Since there are many makes and models of these types of equipment, note that there will be different command structures and protocols for each.

[0045] The logical picture in Figure 6 shows the devices interaction opportunities and some specific examples. The node elements may be physically located within devices (e.g., residential gateway or RGW, DHW, etc.) or as a stand-alone piece of equipment.

[0046] Interactions between all the devices are possible to take advantage of the distributed nature of the network and to allow this sub-network to be more autonomous from the remainder of the power supply chain.

[0047] One example of device interactions (Example 1) between the HVAC unit and the IMP (Intelligent Power Meter) in Home N. The two device proxies allow them to interact, pass data back and forth, exchange capabilities and so on. This interaction may be used to take advantage of market based power pricing by setting the in-home temperature to a bit higher level in the summer during times when the price of electricity is higher. In this example, interactions between the two devices are peer-to-peer and yet each device has access to information from other entities (e.g., the IMP gets pricing information from entities in the global network, etc.). Distributed computing is utilized to accomplish the task (e.g., the HVAC unit's temperature, humidity and air freshness control system; the ability of the IPM to fetch pricing data

and make predictions if the data is not available, etc.) and the task can be performed more or less autonomously, depending on prevailing conditions.

[0048] Another example of interactions between devices (Example 2) is shown in the figure between the hot water heater (DHW) in Home N and the local power source. Again, the various proxies allow these two devices to interact and exchange information and control. The interaction may be a query by the hot water heater to determine if there is sufficient power for a requested water demand for the dishwasher to start. The ability of the two devices to communicate peer-to-peer means that the decision-making process happens quickly and directly. Each of the two devices has access to other network devices (e.g., the DHW is in contact with the dishwasher and the Local Power Source is in constant contact with the generation and distribution grid). Each device has its own computing tasks (e.g., the DHW runs a control algorithm for maintaining temperature and changing the setting to meet existing conditions, while the local power source monitors its internal condition to determine available energy levels).

[0049] As a data plane example (Example 3), the figure shows a PC in Home 1 interacting with an ISP to access the Internet). The residential gateway has an 802.11a proxy to make the connection to the PC and then to the ISP at the other end.

[0050] The proxy concept allows direct device interfaces to be made available at different levels in the hierarchy. So, for instance (Example 4), the interface to the HVAC system in Home 1 may have its entire control interface available to a service element in the distribution network to enable a home service contract to be maintained. That is, the service element would query

the HVAC system on a regular basis to access operational data (e.g., fan total run time to determine filter replacement needs, etc.). It may need to control the unit to verify that it is operating within set limits (e.g., start the burner to view the color and size of the flame). Armed with this data, a service call could be scheduled to replace parts or perform needed maintenance.

[0051] The examples presented above are but a few of the many examples of how the concept would permit the development of an advanced power delivery network. The following will now present a further description of how an appliance, such as a consumer appliance, may be implemented using the principles of the invention.

[0052] Referring to Figure 7, an exemplary consumer appliance in accordance with the invention is illustrated at 100. The appliance has an appliance processor 102 that supports a control interface through which the user can operate the appliance. Illustrated in Figure 7, the control interface is operated by manually operated buttons 106 integrated into the interface. Of course, illustration of buttons for this purpose are intended merely as exemplary. In general, there are numerous ways of controlling an appliance through a control interface, as those of skill in the art will appreciate.

[0053] Through operation of the appliance processor, the control interface works in conjunction with a control variables data store 108. Variables corresponding to different control settings and appliance operating states are stored in data store 108. The user can interact with the control interface 104 to effect control over the data stored in data store 108.

[0054] Node Element 22a associated with appliance 100 is coupled to interact with the appliance processor 102 and thereby gain access

to control variables maintained in data store 108. In one presently preferred embodiment, Node Element 22a is implemented as an embedded system that constitutes part of the programming of appliance processor 102. According to the explanation provided above, Node Element 22a is coupled to the power distribution grid 120 and in this way couples Node Element 22a for communication with other Node Elements coupled to the grid. In Figure 7, two additional Node Elements have been illustrated: Node Element 22b and Node Element 22c.

[0055] Node Element 22b illustrates how the control interface of appliance 100 may be propagated. In Figure 7, Node Element 22b receives a “virtual” control interface 122, shown in dotted lines, by which a device or system associated with Node Element 22b may gain access, via proxy, to the actual control interface 104 of appliance 100. Access is provided by virtue of the communication mechanisms discussed above. This is an illustration of how a Node Element associated with the appliance can send information about the appliance to other devices and systems coupled to the power distribution grid.

[0056] Node Element 22c illustrates how the Node Element 22a of the appliance 100 can also receive information from another device or system. In this case, Node Element 22c is coupled to the internet 130. Communication between Node Elements 22c and 22a make the internet available to the appliance processor 102, and thus available to the appliance 100, as illustrated in dotted lines at 132.

[0057] Further areas of applicability of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description provided hereinafter. It should

be understood that the detailed description and specific examples, while indicating the preferred embodiment of the invention, are intended for purposes of illustration only and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention.

[0058] The description of the invention is merely exemplary in nature and, thus, variations that do not depart from the gist of the invention are intended to be within the scope of the invention. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the invention.